

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02

SS-15 USIA-06 IO-13 AID-05 HA-05 /092 W

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R 230810Z DEC 77

FM AMEMBASSY MANILA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9619

INFO AMEMBASSY JIDDA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MANILA 20205

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, RP

SUBJECT: MINDANAO PEACE INITIATIVE: REPORTED DESIRE OF MNLF
TO REOPEN NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE PHILIPPINE GOVERNMENT AND
CHANGES IN MNLF LEADERSHIP

REF: (A) MANILA 19870 (NOTAL), (B) MANILA 19337 (NOTAL),
(C) STATE 291560, (D) STATE 285440 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: PETER SCHAEFFER CALLED ON EMBOFFS DECEMBER 21
TO DISCUSS THE RESULTS OF HIS TRIP TO JIDDA. SCHAEFFER
CLAIMED THAT NUR MISUARI IS BEING REPLACED AS HEAD OF THE
MNLF BY HASHIM SALAMAT AND THAT THE WORLD ISLAMIC LEAGUE
HAS ALREADY CUT OFF FINANCIAL AID TO MISUARI. THE MUSLIM
REBELS REPORTEDLY WILL NOW OPERATE UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE
BANGSA MORO LIBERATION ORGANIZATION (BMLO). THE BMLO IS
SIAD TO DEISRE TO RESUME NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE PHILIPPINE
GOVERNMENT AND WITH AUTONOMY RATHER THAN SECESSION AS ITS
GOAL. IF THE PHILIPPINES DOES NOT GRANT THE MUSLIMS "MEANING-
FUL AUTONOMY," HOWEVER, SCHAEFFER SAID THE SAUDI ARABIAN
GOVERNMENT HAS INDICATED IT MIGHT USE ECONOMIC SANCTIONS OR
SUBSTANTIAL SUPPORT FOR THE MNLF TO FORCE THE GOP TO
YIELD TO MUSLIM DEMANDS. THE MUSLIMS HOPE TO REOPEN
NEGOTIATIONS IN MARCH, PRIOR TO THE ISLAMIC CONFERENCE
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MEETING IN DAKAR IN MAY OR JUNE. SCHAEFFER'S REPORT CONTAINS
SOME INFORMATION WHICH WE KNOW TO BE TRUE, BUT SOME OF HIS
OTHER FACTS CONTRADICT INFORMATION FROM OTHER SOURCES.
SCHAEFFER INDICATED THE BMLO WOULD LIKE USG ASSISTANCE IN
SUPPORTING ITS BID FOR RECOGNITION BY SAUDI ARABIA AS THE
LEGITIMATE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE PHILIPPINE MUSLIMS.
SCHAEFFER PLANS TO REPORT THESE MATTERS TO BOB OAKLEY IN

WASHINGTON NEXT WEEK. END SUMMARY.

2. PETER SCHAEFFER CALLED ON EMBOFFS DECEMBER 21 TO DISCUSS THE RESULTS OF HIS TALKS WITH PHILIPPINE MUSLIM LEADERS IN JIDDA. SCHAEFFER SPENT A WEEK (DECEMBER 12-18) IN JIDDA MEETING WITH PHILIPPINE MUSLIM LEADERS AND SAUDI OFFICIALS AND BUSINESSMEN. ACCORDING TO SCHAEFFER, THE PHILIPPINE MUSLIM LEADERS ARE PREPARED TO RESUME DISCUSSIONS WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF THE PHILIPPINES (GOP) AND HAVE EVOLVED A SCENARIO WHICH INCLUDES THE REPLACEMENT OF NUR MISUARI AS LEADER OF THE MNLF.

3. MNLF LEADERSHIP. SCHAEFFER RELATED THAT MISUARI IS BEING REPLACED BY HASHIM SALAMAT AND THAT THE MNLF WILL BECOME SUBORDINATE TO THE BANGSA MORO LIBERATION ORGANIZATION (BMLO), THE MNLF'S PARENT ORGANIZATION WHICH HAS STAYED IN THE BACKGROUND UNTIL NOW. MISUARI HAS LOST THE CONFIDENCE OF THE OTHER PHILIPPINE MUSLIM LEADERS AND THE SAUDIS BECAUSE OF HIS SECESSIONIST AND COMMUNIST VIEWS WHICH RUN COUNTER TO THE BELIEFS OF THE OTHER EXPATRIATE PHILIPPINE MUSLIMS. SCHAEFFER STATED THE PROCESS OF REMOVING AND ISOLATING MISUARI HAS ALREADY BEGUN; ON DECEMBER 5 A PETITION FROM MNLF COMMANDERS WAS SENT TO THE WORLD ISLAMIC LEAGUE TO CUT OFF AID TO MISUARI; ON DECEMBER 12 SAUDI PRINCE SAUD WAS ASKED FORMALLY TO RECOGNIZE SALAMAT AS THE HEAD OF THE MNLF; AND ON DECEMBER 16 SALAMAT AGREED TO JOIN THE BMLO
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RULING COUNCIL AND ABIDE BY ITS DECISIONS. THE WORLD ISLAMIC LEAGUE HAS ALREADY CUT OFF AID TO MISUARI AND IS SENDING IT DIRECTLY TO THE FIELD COMMANDERS. THE BMLO COUNCIL IS COMPOSED OF, AMONG OTHERS, RACHID LUCMAN, SALIPADA PENDATUN, MACAPANTON ABBAS AND DOMOCAO ALONTO. THESE "TRADITIONAL LEADERS," AS SCHAEFFER CALLED THEM, ARE MORE FLEXIBLE THAN MISUARI AND DESIRE A PEACE BASED ON AUTONOMY RATHER THAN SECESSION. SCHAEFFER EXPLAINED THAT BY "MEANINGFUL AUTONOMY" THE BMLO DESIRES, INTER ALIA, PRESERVATION OF MUSLIM LANDS, MUSLIM MEMBERSHIP IN THE ARMED FORCES STATIONED IN THE SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES, GOVERNMENT ATTENTION TO MUSLIM ECONOMIC NEEDS, REVISION OF PHILIPPINE HISTORY BOOKS TO INCLUDE THE ROLE PLAYED BY MUSLIMS. THEY WOULD NOT INSIST ON THE LIFTING OF MARTIAL LAW, ONLY A MEANINGFUL ROLE IN ITS ADMINISTRATION IN MUSLIM AREAS. SUPPORT FOR THE BMLO IS SAID TO HAVE BEEN RECEIVED FROM 103 OF THE APPROXIMATELY 160 MNLF FIELD COMMANDERS ARE STILL RESERVING JUDGMENT EXCEPT THREE WHO ARE SUPPORTING MISUARI.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 MANILA 20205

4. SCHAEFFER CLAIMS THAT WITH THE REMOVAL OF MISUARI FROM THE MNLF LEADERSHIP AND PERFORCE THE WEAKENING OF RADICAL LIBYAN INFLUENCE, THE SAUDIS HAVE INDICATED A WILLINGNESS TO TAKE A MORE ACTIVE AND POSSIBLY PUBLIC ROLE IN SUPPORTING THE MNLF. SCHAEFFER STATED HE RECEIVED HINTS OF THIS FROM SAUDI BUSINESSMEN AND GOVERNMENT "ADVISERS" WITH WHOM HE SPOKE. THE SAUDI ATTITUDE IS TO RESOLVE THE SITUATION SHORTLY ONE WAY OR THE OTHER -- EITHER THROUGH NEGOTIATIONS, THE EXERTION OF ECONOMIC PRESSURE OR BY SUPPORTING THE MNLF/BMLO FIGHT AGAINST THE GOP. SCHAEFFER STATED THAT IT WAS HIS IMPRESSION THAT THE SAUDIS WOULD CONSIDER CUTTING PHILIPPINE OIL TO PRESSURE MARCOS TO REACH A SETTLEMENT. SHOULD THEY BELIEVE IT NECESSARY THEY WILL ALSO DIRECTLY AID TO BMLO/MNLF.

5. THE TIME FRAME ENVISAGED BY THE BMLO AND SAUDIS FOR NEGOTIATIONS INVOLVES A CALL FOR NEW MEETINGS IN EARLY FEBRUARY 1978, FOLLOWED BY A CONFERENCE IN MARCH, PRECEDING THE ISLAMIC CONFERENCE IN DAKAR LATER IN MAY OR JUNE. IF THERE ARE NO NEW NEGOTIATIONS THE ISLAMIC CONFERENCE (IC) WILL BE FORCED TO ACT TO BRING PRESSURE ON MARCOS, SCHAEFFER PREDICTED. THE MUSLIMS APPARENTLY FEEL THAT MARCOS MAY REALIZE THAT BRINGING PEACE TO THE SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES WILL ENHANCE HIS DOMESTIC POSITION AND
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THEREFORE BE INCLINED TO NEGOTIATE SERIOUSLY; IF HE DOES NOT SEEM AMENABLE TO NEW TALKS AND ATTEMPTS TO CONTINUE THE CONFLICT TO RATIONALIZE THE CONTINUANCE OF MARTIAL LAW, THE

IC WILL BE PREPARED FIRST TO EXERT ECONOMIC (OIL) PRESSURE AND THEN OPENLY TO SUPPORT THE MNLF. SHOULD THIS OCCUR, SCHAEFFER THOUGHT THE FIGHTING WOULD ESCALATE SIGNIFICANTLY AND INCLUDE URBAN TERRORISM. FOR THE MOMENT, HOWEVER, THE BMLO IS WILLING TO LOWER THE CURRENT LEVEL OF CONFLICT TO FACILITATE THE RESUMPTION OF NEGOTIATIONS. SCHAEFFER STATED THAT ORDERS WERE SENT TO THE COTOBATO REGION OF MINDANAO TO EASE THE LEVEL OF FIGHTING WHILE HE WAS IN JIDDA.

6. US ASSISTANCE. SCHAEFFER INDICATED THAT THE BMLO DESIRES USG ASSISTANCE IN SUPPORTING ITS BID TO GAIN RECOGNITION FROM PRINCE SAUD AS THE LEGITIMATE MUSLIM ORGANIZATION. EMBOFFS EXPRESSED RESERVATIONS ABOUT A US ROLE, NOTING THE DIFFICULTIES OF US INVOLVEMENT IN WHAT IS BASICALLY STILL AN INTERNAL CONFLICT. SCHAEFFER STATED HE WAS COGNIZANT OF THE PROBLEMS THAT THIS REQUEST PRESENTED TO THE US AND THAT HE HAD ALREADY DISCUSSED THIS WITH THE BMLO LEADERS. SCHAEFFER ADDED THAT HE WAS TRAVELING TO ZAMBOANGA DECEMBER 22 TO APPRISE ADMIRAL ESPALDON, THE PHILIPPINE MILITARY COMMANDER FOR ZAMBOANGA AND SULU, OF THESE LATEST DEVELOPMENTS. ON HIS RETURN TO MANILA HE WILL INFORM US INFORMALLY OF ESPALDON'S REACTION. NEXT WEEK SCHAEFFER WILL RETURN TO WASHINGTON AND PLANS TO CALL ON BOB OAKLEY TO DISCUSS HIS MIDDLE EAST TRIP.

7. COMMENT: SCHAEFFER'S INFORMATION IS DIFFICULT TO VERIFY AS A WHOLE. SOME OF WHAT HE SAYS IS CONSISTENT WITH INFORMATION WE HAVE RECEIVED FROM OTHER SOURCES, E.G., SALAMAT'S ATTEMPT TO DISPLACE MISUARI, WHILE OTHER STATEMENTS BY HIM APPEAR TO CONTRADICT THE FACTS AS WE CONFIDENTIAL

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UNDERSTAND THEM--FOR INSTANCE HIS CONTENTION THAT THE BMLO HAS BEEN IN EXISTENCE FOR SOME TIME AND IS THE PARENT ORGANIZATION OF THE MNLF AND THAT A LARGE NUMBER OF MNLF COMMANDERS SUPPORT SALAMAT OVER MISUARI. WE QUESTION, TOO, WHETHER SCHAEFFER HAS SPOKEN WITH MUSLIMS WHO ARE REALLY REPRESENTATIVE OF THE CURRENT THINKING IN THE MNLF OR WHO COMPOSE ONLY A FACTION WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION. SCHAEFFER CORRECTLY CHARACTERIZES THE PERSONS WITH WHOM HE SPOKE AS "TRADITIONAL LEADERS." HOWEVER, THESE INDIVIDUALS HAVE BEEN ABSENT FROM THE PHILIPPINES FOR A CONSIDERABLE PERIOD AND MAY NOT HAVE A SIGNIFICANT POWER BASE REMAINING IN THE SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES. IF THIS IS THE CASE, THEIR MACHINATIONS IN JIDDA MAY HAVE LIMITED RELEVANCY TO THE ONGOING FIGHTING IN THE PHILIPPINES.

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Message Attributes

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